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DTR-6170

7 April 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Deputy Director for Support

SUBJECT : Comments and Observations on the
Proposal of the Management Advisory
Group to Lengthen the Employee Pro-
bationary Period

REFERENCE : Note to DTR from A/DDS dtd 29 Mar '71,
same subject

1. Lengthening the probationary period for new employees to five years and subjecting them to a "rigorous, competitive weeding-out. . . at the end of the third and fifth years" would not be of any significant value to the Office of Training in pruning its rolls of unsuitable or unsatisfactory personnel. Except for Career Trainees, most professional requirements are filled through conversion of officers from other career services and through the rotational tours of experienced personnel. During the last five years approximately 15 professional people were obtained through external recruitment. Accordingly, the majority of OTR staff officers have been with the Agency well beyond five years. The present one-year probationary period is entirely adequate for evaluating the suitability of new clerical employees who are assigned to OTR from the Office of Personnel at an average rate of seven per year.

2. The MAG proposal would probably have a depressing effect on recruiting people into the Agency, especially if they are told (and they should be) that an offer of permanent employment is subject to the satisfactory completion of a five-year probationary period. As it applies to the Career Trainee, I think it is too long. The average age

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of the CT at present is 27. The prospect of being automatically eliminated at age 32 on the basis of competitive rankings and fixed percentages would not likely be considered an attractive proposition. I believe that selection procedures currently in force sufficiently guarantee that our CTs have all the necessary qualities and background for success in the Agency. Where failure occurs, it is often explained in terms of the individual not having received the right amount of direction, guidance, supervision, and training during his developmental years. Occasionally, outside factors, such as family problems, show up early or late in his career and affect his performance and flexibility in regard to assignments.

3. Speaking of Career Trainees, I want to correct and comment on a statement made in paragraph 6 which says that CTs often receive "protective performance evaluations" and "extra help" from their counselors. There is no policy or other directive existing in OTR which advocates the assignment of "protective" ratings (false, padded, inaccurate?) on CTs. To my knowledge, there never has been a practice of this kind. Further, Program Officers of the Career Training Staff encourage the utmost candor in reports prepared on the CT by component supervisors during interim assignments of the young officer. Whether or not this is done conscientiously, of course, lies beyond the control of OTR. I am not certain what is precisely meant by the term "extra help" except to note that Program Officers, or counselors, are obligated to help the new CT with his problems, official and personal, whenever they are asked to do so, and if appropriate. This function is quite identical to that of the duty of the supervisor during the early stages of any other employee's career. There is simply no one else to do the job, and, in a real sense, the Program Officer is the CT's supervisor. It would be unthinkable not to offer this basic service to a new employee.

4. Perhaps a fuller explanation would clarify the implications of the last sentence in paragraph 11 which reads: "The CS Evaluation Boards are having little difficulty identifying a marginal 5% at each grade among more senior officers and we think the rationale of a probationary period argues for more rigorous pruning then, than at mid-career." From the statement, I do not quite see how it can be concluded that a "rigorous pruning" during the five-year probational phase will substantially reduce (?) or eliminate (?) the need for such action in the middle time of an officer's career. This conclusion

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presumes that nearly everything detrimental to success will manifest itself during the early years. This would be an ideal situation, but I am not sure we can rely on it totally even though the limited experience of the CS Evaluation Panels seems to have produced some justification for this method (pp. 2-3). In any event, why leave the job to a panel when supervisors and career service heads should be examining the records of all newcomers on a continuing basis? Though such a review would uncover some potential misfits, it still does not come to grips with the problem mentioned in paragraph 4 of the MAG memo -- that of the officer who has "peaked-out" at his mid-career point.

5. I am disturbed by the line of reasoning set forth in paragraph 12 as justification for establishing a separation program founded on intensive competitive rankings and fixed-percentage cuts at the end of three and five-year periods. Granting that this approach might be the one to use, it should be applied for the right reasons -- that it is the fairest, most efficient, and most accurate, not that it relieves the supervisor of the distasteful chores of "documenting the record, writing the fateful recommendation, facing-down an irate employee," or "palming him off on another office." It is conceivable that a system such as the one advocated in paragraph 12 would not promote good management practices. Primarily, it is oriented toward helping the supervisor to avoid his on-going responsibility to evaluate the employee candidly and take whatever action is necessary at the time, including the preparation of unfavorable Fitness Reports and the accompanying warning letter. The tendency could well foster an attitude of "let the panel do it." I also think that deferral of action to three and five-year periods would have the unpleasant effect of focusing attention, internal and possibly public, on the release of relatively large numbers of employees at the same time.

6. I doubt if a five-year period of probation is needed to evaluate every professional employee. Something like that amount of time might be necessary in the Clandestine Service, considering the time required for training, Headquarters exposure, and an overseas tour. It certainly should be less for some research and analytical jobs in the Intelligence and in the Science and Technology Directorates. I wouldn't need five years to assess the abilities of an instructor in OTR. Accordingly, the adoption of a five-year trial period throughout the Agency would not be realistic. The Organization would probably end up with more than one set of probational standards.

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7. The solution to many of the problems outlined in the MAG paper are already available. In two words it adds up to "vigilant management." The following points are relevant:

a. Retain the one-year probationary period. It is entirely adequate for evaluating clerical employees and possibly other special categories of personnel. As stated in paragraph 3 of the MAG paper it succeeded in eliminatin[redacted] of the professionals. Possibly, Management should encourage that even greater emphasis should be placed on evaluating employees during this period. OTR training programs could be of further help in achieving this objective.

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b. Continue to stress the fact that Fitness Reports must record absolutely accurate evaluations of employee performance and that this is a supervisory obligation, not an option. The uniform application of this elementary principle of good management would eliminate the need for procedures like the ones outlined in the MAG paper: it deals with the problem as it arises and on its own merits. OTR can help here also.

c. Employ more diligently and extensively the review procedures prescribed [redacted] As you know, these regulations require that at the end of the three-year provisional period the Head of the Career Service must ". . . carefully evaluate the individual's suitability for selection as a Career Employee. . ." The regulation also establishes procedures for handling a recommendation that the employee's Career-Provisional appointment be terminated. Obviously, the various career services have not used this means of separating employees unfit for, uninterested in, or unable to assume the responsibilities and obligations of Agency employment. Perhaps a directive or instruction from top management is necessary to activate this little used regulation.

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[redacted]
HUGH T. CUNNINGHAM
Director of Training

Attachment

MAG Recommendation

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP

25 MAR 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Executive Director

SUBJECT: Recommendation on Lengthening the Employee Probationary Period

1. CIA officers enjoy, in fact if not in theory, virtually unparalleled job security. They do not face the service officers' maximum time-in-grade hurdles nor the periodic competitive weeding out FSO's undergo.

2. There is one time only in his career when the inept CIA employee faces any real prospect of discharge: during his first or probationary year. Having survived 365 days, he is safe against all but the grossest offenses against security, decorum, or the law.

3. The Agency, traditionally very chary of exercising the DCI's statutory authority to make summary dismissals, has only proved willing to discharge the inept or miscast employee during his probationary year. In the last five years an average of [REDACTED] new employees were so separated each year. In contrast, virtually none were discharged during this five years after their probationary periods had been completed.

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4. The Agency seems content, and perhaps is morally obligated, to carry to retirement eligibility the formerly able officer who peaked after 15 years and is coasting. It correctly feels no similar obligations to the new officer who usually has minimal family obligations and a minuscule investment of tenure in his intelligence career.

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5. Despite the best of screening aids, hiring mistakes are inevitable. Many new employees themselves recognize mistaken career choices, and the greatest percentage of resignations in Agency professional ranks occur during the first five years of employment.

6. The Agency gives itself only a year to recognize and correct such hiring mistakes. MAG believes this time is clearly too short. CT's are still in training status when the year has expired (and are often receiving protective performance evaluations and "extra help" from their counselors.) PTP officers are still busily indexing documents in RID and dreaming of a future CS career. CS careerists can be evaluated fully only on their field performance, and few are lucky enough to escape desk servitude within a year.

7. MAG finds cumbersome, unnecessary, and possibly disadvantageous the suggestion of hiring new employees under contract. The paperwork is unnecessary, and the Agency's primary recruiting theme - "a career in intelligence" - becomes a bit hollow when followed by a contract offer with the standard 30-day notice clause. Adoption of such a practice would undoubtedly put us at a hiring disadvantage.

8. The contract suggestion rests in fact on recognition that Agency management has grown accustomed to letting contracts lapse but has shied away from firing staffers. It is thus in essence a dodge to circumvent traditional attitudes and practices.

9. Why not, instead, change practice? There is no statutory bar to CIA's setting any probationary period it wishes for new employees. MAG advocates adopting a five-year probationary period, with rigorous, competitive weeding-out hazards to be faced at the end of the third and fifth years.

10. This proposal parallels roughly the Macomber task force recommendations for fairly ruthless competitive selection out of less promising junior FSO's. It assumes that marginality can be detected fairly early in a career. (There is good

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evidence for this, in, among other places, the results of the CS evaluation panels.) It assumes that surgery is better and more humane early in a career than later. It holds the promise of fewer career misfits and of fewer future cuts in the established officer corps. It permits us to risk a greater infusion of new blood.

11. MAG advocates competitive ranking of new employees in each directorate and the automatic discharge at the end of three years of the lowest 10% and at the end of five years of another 5%. (There is nothing sacrosanct about the percentage cuts recommended but we think their logic can be supported. The CS Evaluation Boards are having little difficulty identifying a marginal 5% at each grade among more senior officers and we think the rationale of a probationary period argues for more rigorous pruning then than at mid-career.)

12. We suggest this procedure because the firing decision is always a painful one. No "sensible" supervisor wants to document the record, write the fateful recommendation, nor face down an irate employee. It is easier to try to palm off a marginal employee on another shop. The fixed percentage requirement avoids all this and ensures that the non-competitive officer is impartially identified and acted against. The two-stage procedure should permit some career experimentation and the rehabilitation of employees possibly miscast in one directorate but entirely competitive in another.

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